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Effective Control of Household Pests

Information for Older Adults and Family Caregivers

Responsible pesticide use is an important issue across generations.

Older adults may be more susceptible to the effects of exposure to pesticides because of age-related changes in how the body processes chemicals.

Using an integrated pest management system can help you avoid unnecessary use of pesticides.

Did you know that eight out of ten U.S. households use pesticides both indoors and outside their home?¹ Examples of pesticides in common use include cockroach sprays and baits, termite control products, rat poison, flea and tick sprays and powders, weed killers, bug sprays, and kitchen and bath disinfectants.

Environmental Hazards of Pesticides

Exposure to high levels of pesticides, usually due to improper application of a product, may lead to acute effects such as headaches, dizziness, muscle twitching, weakness, and nausea. Long-term and/or excessive exposure to some pesticides has been linked to cancer, reproductive effects, and effects on the central nervous system.

Preventing Exposure

Grandparents can play an important role in keeping children safe from hazardous pesticides by keeping them out reach.

Emergency room surveys suggest that children under age six are more likely to be poisoned while visiting grandparents where poisons are more likely to be in reach and without child-resistant closures than when in their own homes. In addition, while older adults account for only 2.8% of reported poisoning incidents, they account for 5.9% of all cases with a moderate to major medical outcome and 28% of deaths.²

If you or a family member shows symptoms of having been poisoned, call the National Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222

Footnotes

¹ U.S. EPA, National Household Pesticide Usage Study, 1992, Office of Pesticide Programs

² National Poison Control Center Data, 1993-1998

What You Can Do to Control and Reduce Exposure to Pesticide Hazards

Tips for home pesticide use:

- Read the label. The pesticide label is your best guide for safe and effective use of pesticides. If you have impaired vision, ask for assistance.
- Store pesticides only in their original containers. Never use an empty pesticide container for another purpose.
- Use a community disposal program in your neighborhood. Check with your local solid waste management authority, environmental agency, or health department to find out if your community has a hazardous waste disposal program. If not, carefully follow the disposal instructions on the label.
- Never use outdoor-pesticides indoors.
- Keep people and pets away from areas where pesticide sprays and foggers are applied. Read label to determine when it is safe for people or pets to re-enter area.
- Avoid spraying where you prepare or store food, and avoid treating entire floors, walls or ceilings.
- Limit pesticide applications to infested area and use only the amount recommended on the product label.
- Avoid applying pesticides outdoors on a windy day. Before spraying close the doors and windows of your home.
- After applying a pesticide, wash any parts of your body or clothes that might have come in contact with the pesticide.

Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – Avoid Unnecessary Use of Pesticides

The US EPA recommends using an overall pest management strategy, often called “integrated pest management (IPM)” for control of pests in homes or apartment buildings. IPM is a pest management system that combines non-chemical control strategies with less toxic pesticide use minimizing risk to human health and the environment.

For example, you might use traps, baits and gels instead of sprays to control pests. IPM minimizes health risks for susceptible populations, such as older adults.

Learn More About EPA’s Aging Initiative

EPA’s Aging Initiative, which is working to protect older adults from environmental health risks through the coordination of research, prevention strategies and public education. Visit www.epa.gov/aging.

For more information on pesticides, call 703-305-5017 or visit our web site at www.epa.gov/pesticides

